A NOTE ON SPLIT ERGATIVITY IN BURUSHASKI[1]

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I.

In his pioneer work on the Burushaski language, Lorimer (1935a: 64) noted the existence of what has been later described as an ergative construction :[2] the subject[3] of a transitive verb is in the ergative case (a special case, usually marked by the suffix *-e*) while the subject of intransitive verbs, as well as the object of transitive verbs, are in the absolutive case (morphologically unmarked) as appears in the examples 1(*a*)–(*c*) below :

1(*a*) *úne* *in* *mucúčáa* 'you marry her'
you-E she-A marry-present

(*b*) *un* *hurúšáa* 'you sit'
you-A sit-present

(*c*) *in* *hurúšubó* 'she sits'
she-A sit-present

He further noted what has been later described as an ergative split :[4] in some cases the subject of a transitive verb appears in the absolutive case, as in example 2.

2. *un* *in* *mucúčuma* 'you will marry her'
you-A she-A marry-future

In his description of the split, Lorimer claims that the subject is marked for ergative when the verb is in a past-based tense, and marked for absolutive in a present-based tense.[5]

[1] We would like to thank here the following : Bernard Comrie, Rajendra Singh and, more particularly, Igor Mel'čuk, who have read an earlier version of this paper and provided us with many helpful comments.

[2] cf. Mel'čuk (1978 : 386).

[3] What constitutes the grammatical subject in Burushaski does not appear to be open to dispute. The inductive definition proposed by Mel'čuk (1978) will isolate as subject (in Burushaski) the NP which triggers the (systematic) verbal agreement. This definition relies on the specific surface syntactic properties which the subject is required to share fully with no other NPs in the language. Verbal agreement appears to be the most salient such property, and although the verb may contain up to three agreement markers : a *clitic pronoun*, a *plural marker*, and a (systematic) *agreement marker* (as an example Yasin Bu. *mahiljača* 'I will dip you (pl.)' contains the following constituents : the clitic pronoun *ma* 'you (pl.)', the radical *-hil-* 'to dip', the plural marker *-ja-*, the tense marker *-č-*, and the agreement marker *-a* 'I'), all three markers do not have the same status. Whether or not a verb takes a pronoun clitic or a plural marker is an idiosyncratic property of that verb which must be lexically indicated ; furthermore, the plural marker is always optional. On the other hand, whether or not a verb takes a (systematic) agreement marker is a syntactic property which applies to all verbs (with one exception, however : *d-ya* 'to come'). This means that in most sentences, there is *one* NP which is (systematically) cross-referenced through verbal agreement, and constitutes a syntactically privileged NP which meets the definition for subject.

The syntactic-semantic definition proposed by Dixon (1979 : 108) where the subject is either the 'only obligatory NP in an intransitive clause' or 'the NP in a transitive clause which can be the agent' gives the same results for Burushaski : the subject isolated by this definition has also the property of triggering the (systematic) verbal agreement.

[4] cf. Dixon (1979 : 95).

[5] We follow here the terminology adopted by Lorimer and repeated in Berger (1974) for ease of exposition, although the opposition between past-based and present-based tenses may be better understood as an opposition between durative and perfective (cf. Tiffou and Pesot, forthcoming).

This opposition between past-based and present-based tenses was primarily morphological. In Lorimer's definition a tense is past-based if it is formed with the primary radical, e.g. *hurúṭ-* 'to sit', and present-based if it is formed with the derived radical, e.g. *hurúd-* (historically, it appears that the derived radical was formed by the addition of a palatal *-y-* ; this is no longer

Lorimer, however, did not always correctly note vowel length and stress, which are both phonological in this language, and play an important part in the distinction between ergative and absolutive, cf. for example, the opposition between the anaphoric and deictic third person pronouns given in 3 below, which Lorimer (1935a : 124) analyses as a single pronoun with the case markings given in 4.

3.	*anaphoric*	*deictic*
abs.	*in*	*iné*
erg.	*ínc*	*inée*

4. abs. *i·n ~ i·nɛ*
erg. *i·nɛ*

It is easy to understand why this could lead to some mis-generalization.

In this note, we shall describe the current use of the ergative case in the two main dialects of Burushaski as it appears from our own observations,[6] and re-examine the data presented by Lorimer. We shall see that there is no reason to believe that the use of the ergative case was any different in Lorimer's period, and that the ergative split is much more limited than anticipated ; in particular, in Hunza Burushaski, the ergative split is limited to first and second persons ; furthermore, subjects of transitive verbs appear in the absolutive case with only two tenses : future and imperative.

II. *Ergative case marking in Yasin Burushaski*

In Yasin Burushaski, the ergative marker *-e* is normally assimilated to a preceding vowel and combines with it to form a single long vowel,[7] e.g. *ja-e* > *jáa*. This means that for nouns ending with a vowel, and this includes most personal pronouns, the ergative is marked by the lengthening of this vowel,[8]

true, and both radicals must be listed in the lexicon). The distribution of finite tenses according to this definition is as follows, in Yasin Burushaski (Berger 1974 : 47) :

Past base : (simple tenses) preterite I and II, imperative (and forms in *ẹ*) ; (periphrastic tenses) perfect, pluperfect, reduplicated imperfect.

Present base : (simple tenses) future ; (periphrastic tenses) present, imperfect, conditional.

[6] The data on Yasin Burushaski have been collected by the authors in field investigations conducted in the summers of 1975, 1978 and 1979 and supported in part through grants from the University of Montreal (CAFIR), the Canada Council (S75-0440) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (S76-1217). The data on Hunza Burushaski have been provided by a single informant, Allamah Nasir Uddin, from the village of Hyderabad in Hunza, with whom we were privileged to work at the University of Montreal during the winter term 1980. We want to acknowledge here our deepest gratitude for his collaboration and his willingness to share with us his insights on his language.

[7] We adopt here the phonemic transcription proposed in Berger (1974), except for vowel length which we represent as a sequence of two identical vowels (as proposed for Hunza Burushaski in Berger, forthcoming).

[8] It appears to us that there is a neutralization of phonemic length in unstressed word-final vowels ; in particular we were not able to hear a difference between the different occurrences of, for example, *čúmu* 'fish' when it was subject of transitive or intransitive verbs. Some of our informants, however, claimed that the unstressed final vowel of such nouns is lengthened in the ergative case. The opposition between ergative and absolutive cases is also neutralized in words which end with a long vowel in the absolutive form, e.g. *šée* 'wool', *yúu* '(his) children', as there is only one degree of length in the language.

Vowel length is not always easy to determine even with word-final stressed vowels : there appears to be a variable rule of shortening for such vowels for some of our informants. This means in particular that phonetic [ja] may be the manifestation of either morphological absolutive *ja* or ergative *jáa* for such informants.

It must be noted, however, that Burushaski has a very large class of nouns ending in a consonant where the opposition is unequivocal for all lexical classes, e.g. *hir* : *híre* 'man (abs. : erg.)', *gus* : *gúse* 'woman (abs. : erg.)', *hayór* : *hayóre* 'horse (abs. : erg.)', *noṣ* : *nóṣe* 'sapling (abs. : erg.)'. There is good evidence for the distribution given here for 3rd person subjects. The opposition between ergative and absolutive, however, is more easily overlooked with 1st person singular and 2nd person pronouns which end with a vowel.

as in the opposition *ja* : *jáa* ' I (abs. : erg.) '. Previous analyses of Yasin Burushaski, however, failed to note regularly vowel length, which resulted in a distorted picture of the use of the ergative case.[9]

The data we have collected show that the opposition between ergative and absolutive cases exists not only with nouns (as noted by Lorimer) and third person pronouns ending in *-e* (as noted by Berger),[10] but for all other pronouns, except the second person singular pronoun *un* which remains *un* where the other pronouns are marked for the ergative (contrary to what we noted in the examples 1 and 2 in Hunza Burushaski). The respective forms of the pronoun subjects of intransitive and transitive verbs appear in paradigms 5 and 6.

5. *Paradigm of intransitive verbs in the preterite* [11]

d-yan-/duyán ' to be tired, worn out '

		sing.	plur.
1st		*ja dáyana*	*mi dimíyanen*
2nd		*un dukúyana*	*ma damáyanen*
3rd	*hm*	*ne díyani*	*we dúyanen*
	hf	*mo dumúyanu*	
	x	*se díyani*	*ce dúyanen*
	y	*te duyáni*	*ke duyáni*

6. *Paradigm of transitive verbs in the preterite*

yárk- ' to catch, to carry ' (used with the objects *çen* ' bird ' and *mewá* ' fruit ')

		sing.	plur.
1st		*jáa çen yárka*	*míi çen yárken*
2nd		*un çen yárka*	*máa çen yárken*
3rd	*hm*	*née çen yárki*	*wée çen yárken*
	hf	*móo çen yárku*	
	x	*sée çen yárki*	*cée çen yárken*
	y	*tée mewá yárki*	*kée mewá yárki*

We noted no split of ergative case whatever with 3rd person pronouns and nouns : whatever the tense of the verb, they are marked for ergative case when they are subject of a transitive verb, e.g. *née éti* ' he did it (preterite) ', *née éčimi* (future), *née éčum bái* (present). We inadvertently failed to elicit the 1st and 2nd person pronouns for most tenses (indeed, we limited our investigation of the contrast *ja* : *jáa*, *mi* : *míi* and *ma* : *máa* to the preterite only) ; we are therefore unable to decide whether or not there exists in Yasin an ergative split for these pronouns as we shall see is the case in Hunza.

[9] This explains, for example, the wrong conclusions obtained by Wagner (1978 : p. 47 and n. 56).

[10] Lorimer (1935a : 425–7) does not isolate a distinctive ergative form for any pronoun. Berger (1974 : 4, 8) warns the reader that he did not note vowel length regularly. He actually was consistent in distinguishing the ergative from the absolutive forms for pronouns ending with the vowel *e*. He usually transcribes all other pronouns with a short vowel, except in a few cases, e.g. *jáa* in the entry for *-méen-* ' to make someone drink ', p. 165, where the subject of a transitive verb is transcribed with a long vowel.

[11] In these paradigms, we use the traditional terminology for Burushaski, with *hm* for human masculine, *hf* for human feminine, *h* for human, *x* and *y* are two other classes of nouns (in part arbitrary, but *x* includes all animals and *y* all trees). The infixes after *d-* in the paradigm of *d-yan-* in 5, in the paradigm of *d-yal-* in 7, and the prefixes in the paradigm of *-t-* in 9 and 10 are clitic pronouns. They may belong to three different series : unstressed (*a*, *ku*, *i* . . .), high stressed (*á*, *kú*, *í* . . .), or low stressed (*à*, *kò*, *ì* . . .) ; the choice between the series is lexically determined, and following Berger (1974), they will be represented by the signs –, ˊ, and ˋ respectively in the entry of the verb.

It is important to note that if *un* ' you (sg.) ' is used for subjects both of transitive and intransitive verbs, this does not mean that *un* will receive an accusative case when it is the object of a transitive verb, contrary to what happens in some other cases of split case-marking (as described in Dixon 1979 : 87 for Dyirbal).[12]

III. *Ergative case marking in Hunza Burushaski*

In Hunza Burushaski, the ergative marker *-e* is regularly assimilated to a preceding *a* and combines with it to form the single long vowel *áa*, e.g. *šuqá+e* > *šuqáa* ; it combines with a preceding *e* to form the single long vowel *ée*, e.g. *iné+e* > *inée* ;[13] elsewhere it normally remains as *e*. Slightly irregular are the first person pronouns, where *jáa* is the ergative form of *je* ' I ', and *míi* the ergative form of *mi* ' we '.[14]

Again, we found no split of the ergative for third person subjects of transitive verbs, which are always marked for ergative, whatever the tense of the verb. There is a split, however, for first and second person subjects of transitive verbs. They are marked for ergative for all tenses, except for the future, and possibly for the imperative. With verbs in the future, first person pronouns take the absolutive form, while second person pronouns take freely either the absolutive or the ergative form.[15] Examples showing this distribution are given in the following paradigms :

7. *Paradigm of intransitive verbs in the preterite*

d-yal- ' to hear ' [16]

		sing.	plur.
1st		*je dáyalam*	*mi deméyaluman*
2nd		*un dokóyaluma*	*ma damáyaluman*
3rd	*hm*	*in déyalimi*	*u dóyaluman*
	hf	*in domóyalumo*	
	x	*es déyalimi*	*ec dóyaliyen*
	y	*et déyalimi*	*ek déyalimi*

8. *Paradigm of transitive verbs in the preterite*

-t- ' to do '

	sing.	plur.
1st	*jáa étam*	*mir étuman*
2nd	*úne étuma*	*máa étuman*

[12] It must also be noted with respect to the invariance of *un* that it is not consonant with the hierarchy found by Silverstein (1976) as reported in Dixon (1978 : 87–9) which would predict that the invariance of *un* ' you (sg.) ' should extend to its plural counterpart *ma*.

[13] There is also a neutralization of phonemic length in unstressed word final vowels, with the same results as in Yasin Burushaski. In the Nagir dialect of Burushaski, however, vowel length appears to remain phonemic in post-stressed syllables (cf. Berger, forthcoming).

[14] The form *jáa* may well be the regular phonological form corresponding to a former absolutive form **ja* in Hunza Burushaski (in many cases we find a correspondence between short *a* in Yasin and *e* in Hunza which supports this historical hypothesis).

[15] Actually this distribution of the ergative cases seems to be a property of the pronoun itself, not of the morphological person. More precisely, first and second person pronouns have a familiar/pejorative variant : *uŋgó* for *un* ' you (sg.) ', *mimáy* for *mi* ' we ' and *mamáy* for *ma* ' you (pl.) '. These familiar variants are not frequently used as subjects, and our informant was hesitant in some cases as to which case should be used. It appears, however, that with these familiar/pejorative pronouns, the ergative form is the normal form when they are subject of transitive verbs, even in the future.

[16] The verb *d-yal-* ' to hear ' is morphologically intransitive although it appears semantically to be transitive (the object, however, always has the semantic content of ' the noise of . . . ').

		sing.	plur.
3rd	*hm*	*íne étimi*	*úwe étuman*
	hf	*íne étumo*	
	x	*ése étimi*	*éce étiyen*
	y	*éte étimi*	*éke étimi*

9. *Paradigm of transitive verbs in the present*

-t- ' to do '

		sing.	plur.
1st		*jáa éčabáa*	*míi éčabáan*
2nd		*úne éčáa*	*máa éčáan*
3rd	*hm*	*íne éčáy*	*úwe éčáan*
	hf	*íne éčubó*	
	x	*ése éčibi*	*éce éčiyén*
	y	*éte éčilá*	*éke éčicán*

10. *Paradigm of transitive verbs in the future*

-t- ' to do '

		sing.	plur.
1st		*je éčam*	*mi éčen*
2nd		*ún(e) éčuma*	*má(a) éčuman*
3rd	*hm*	*íne ééi*	*úwe éčuman*
	hf	*íne éčo*	
	x	*ése ééi*	*éce éčiyen*
	y	*éte ééi*	*éke ééi*

When we elicited the paradigms of the imperative we were not given the pronoun subjects and failed to ask for them. It appears, however, from Lorimer's (1938) texts that pronoun subjects may be used with imperative verbs and are not marked for the ergative in these texts, even when the verb is transitive.[17] Along the same lines, we elicited the subject of the verb *-t-* ' to do ' on one occasion (but not systematically for many other verbs as we did for the other finite tenses) in a tense which Lorimer (1935a : §§ 321, 357, 358) describes as a ' form in *ṣ* ' (a past-based tense which may be used for the imperative, particularly for 1st and 3rd persons which lack a true imperative). We obtained both the ergative and the absolutive for the first person singular : *jáa étiṣa* or *je étiṣa* ' let me do it ' ; we did not, however, elicit the other persons for this form in *ṣ*.

IV. *Lorimer's description for Hunza Burushaski*

As we mentioned earlier, Lorimer did not correctly note vowel length, which in some cases is the only feature distinguishing the ergative case from the absolutive. Nor did he note the proper stress difference which sometimes is the only feature distinguishing the anaphoric pronouns from the deictic ones, as appears in 11 below :

[17] All occurrences of 2nd person singular subject pronouns of transitive verbs in the imperative in Lorimer's (1935b) texts have the absolutive form *un* : *un gulé ke jáar aso* ' (you) tell me this also ' (p. 38/21), *un áar éti* ' (you) do it (i.e. the explanation) to me ' (p. 84/17), *un je acú* ' (you)

11. *Inventory of 3rd person pronouns*

	anaphoric		*deictic*		*proximate anaphoric*		*proximate deictic*	
	abs.	erg.	abs.	erg.	abs.	erg.	abs.	erg.
he/she (*h*)	*in*	*íne*	*iné*	*inée*	*khin*	*khíne*	*khiné*	*khinée*
it (*x*)	*es*	*ése*	*isé*	*isée*	*khos*	*khóse*	*gusé*	*gusée*
it (*y*)	*et*	*éte*	*ité*	*itée*	*khot*	*khóte*	*guté*	*gutée*
they (*h*)	*u*	*úwe*	*uwé*	*uwée*	*khu*	*khúwe*	*khuwé*	*khuwée*
they (*x*)	*ec*	*éce*	*icé*	*icée*	*khoc*	*khócc*	*gucé*	*gucée*
they (*y*)	*ek*	*éke*	*iké*	*ikée*	*khok*	*khóke*	*guké*	*gukée*

In his analysis anaphoric and deictic pronouns were lumped together as simple pronouns, which made it impossible to distinguish the ergative form from the absolutive. If the use of the ergative case was any different in Lorimer's time, however, we should observe it in the large collection of texts he published (Lorimer : 1935b), by considering only those cases where he normally makes the distinction between ergative and absolutive, i.e. nouns ending with a consonant or the vowels *i* and *u*, or the first and second person singular pronouns. It appears, after studying these texts,[18] that the nature of the ergative split was not then significantly different from what it is now. We found that third person subjects of transitive verbs in the present [19] and in the future [20] are regularly marked for the ergative. First and second person subjects are, with few exceptions, marked for the ergative when the verb is in the present, but, again with few exceptions, for the absolutive when the verb is in the future.[21]

[18] We eliminated in our analysis of these texts, all the cases where a noun was head of a relative construction and could be interpreted as the subject of both an intransitive and a transitive verb, as in *the man* (*who*) *came said a few words*. We do not understand yet completely the syntax of such constructions ; it is possible that the heads of these constructions can be analysed as part of the main clause or as part of the embedded construction. In any case, the ergative marking appears to be optional then, and cannot be taken into account here. We also eliminated occurrences with reflexive pronouns such as *jáa akhér* (e.g. p. 12/9) which are syntactically ambiguous : the free-form pronouns *jáa*, *je*, *un*, *úne*, etc. (as they appear in paradigms 7 to 10) are normally omitted, except when they are used for emphasis ; therefore forms such as *jáa akhér* can be ambiguously interpreted as consisting of a subject pronoun *jáa* ' I (erg.) ' followed by the reflexive object *akhér* ' myself (abs.) ' or of the single NP object *jáa akhér* ' my own self ' where *jáa* ' I (gen.) ' is now the genitive of the pronoun *je* ' I '. (The expression *jáa akhér* would not be ambiguous if it were preceded by ergative *jáa* ; this heavy construction, however, appears to be excluded on stylistic grounds).

[19] We checked all the occurrences of third person subjects of verbs in the present which can contrast in Lorimer's description for the ergative and the absolutive in one large text (' Marriage custom in Hunza ', pp. 298–308). There were eleven pertinent cases, all marked for the ergative : *haranuše* (299/4), *hire* (302/4), *hikume* (302/18), *axone* (302/18), *moaguse* (306/3), *garonie* (306/9), *yúse* (306/11), *imie* (306/19) and *mumie* (306/22).

[20] We found only four pertinent subjects of transitive verbs in the future in the complete series of texts, all of them are marked for the ergative : *pfute* (12/10), *méne* (170/21, 170/23, 172/3).

[21] We checked all the occurrences of first and second person singular pronouns in the whole series of texts, with the following results :

(1) There are 33 occurrences of *je* ' I (abs.) '—including one used with *hénas* ' to know '—(12/2, 20/20, 22/1, 24/10, 24/13, 30/15, 32/2, 58/26, 60/9, 62/17, 62/24, 66/15, 72/7, 74/26, 84/22, 90/14, 96/12, 106/6, 118/22, 118/26, 124/2, 136/10, 136/20, 146/2, 146/21, 154/16, 160/22, 194/7, 260/8, 260/10, 292/7) and no occurrences of *jáa* ' I (erg.) ' in the future.

(2) There are practically no occurrences of *un*/*úne* ' you (sg.) ' in the future ; the only case noted is *úne* ' you (erg.) ' used with the verb *hénas* (72/22).

(3) There are 11 occurrences of *jáa* ' I (erg.) '—including six used with *hénas*—(28/10, 56/1, 58/24, 62/3, 100/13, 100/14, 160/24, 164/2, 164/3, 210/18, 226/6) contrasting with only three occurrences of *je* ' I (abs.) ' (16/15, 72/15, 136/19) in the present.

(4) There are 11 occurrences of *úne* ' you (erg.) '—including three used with *hénas*—(60/6, 66/8, 66/10, 66/13, 84/17, 118/21, 146/1, 158/10, 160/25, 168/9, 184/1) contrasting with only four occurrences of *un* ' you (abs.) ' (92/13, 118/26, 132/14, 146/3) in the present.

Finally, let us note that the exceptional absence of ergative marking in Lorimer's texts is

V. *Conclusion*

This short note shows that there is an ergativity split in Hunza Burushaski but it is less general than indicated by Lorimer. The subject of transitive verbs is normally marked for the ergative, except when the verb is in the future (and possibly in the imperative) where first person subjects have the absolutive form and second person subjects have either the absolutive or the ergative form.

Whether or not the same situation holds for Yasin Burushaski is still a matter of conjecture, as neither our data nor the descriptions provided by Berger or Lorimer contain the necessary information.

not limited to constructions with present tenses, but is also found for other tenses (e.g. *un* for expected *únc* with a verb in the pluperfect, 138/21) and seems therefore to correspond to a more general variability everywhere in these texts.

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